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EXPANDING CONSCIOUSNESS

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What do we mean when we say that we know a thing or a person? We look at an object and immediately our senses communicate an impression to the mind which, on receiving it, forms an image. Even after the object is removed from our view, the mind is able to recall its image. The image need not necessarily be of a solid thing; it can be the 'image' of, for example, the taste of a pudding or the fragrance of a flower. We give a name to the thing or the experience and moment the name is uttered, the image is recalled. When we look at a person or a thing for the second time, we do not see the person or the thing direct but through the images which we have already formed of them and kept stored in our memory. Our minds are filled either with these images or the various impressions produced by them. The mind is a storehouse of memories and it has the faculty of making images of everything it perceives. Our ordinary thinking is done through mental images and the lower mind is full of these; it is for this reason that it is called the 'concrete mind'. Its range is confined to *nama* and *rupa* or name and form. This image-making faculty is called *chitta* according to the Vedantic classification of the functions of the mind. These images are generally formed through direct contact with objects. In some cases they are recalled from memory and magnified. In others, images are created out of the imagination and connect present experience to future anticipation as in the case of fear. These images, real or fancied, become the content of the mind that forms them.

A continuous stream of images passes through the mind. When we look at a running stream from a particular point on the bank, we know that the water at that point is not the same; the water is constantly flowing and moving

away and new water takes its place. But the water is similar in nature therefore it appears to be the same water. In the same way, the mental image present in the mind at any given moment is not the same as that of the previous moment; the images are always changing although they appear to be the same. There is a continuous stream of images passing through the mind of every person. Although they appear to be exactly the same (like the running water) they are not so in reality. Exactly similar images are reproduced in the mind, therefore, they appear to be the same. There is a relentless succession and change of these mental images in the mind. The quality of the mind which underlies the succession of mental images is known in Vedantic terminology as *manas*. While *chitta* creates the images *manas* moves them continuously in quick succession. *Manas* is the dynamic aspect of the mind while *chitta* is the static. It is only when these images are illuminated by *buddhi* – the light of consciousness – that they acquire meaning and significance. Mind is considered *jada* (material, insentient) as far as *chitta* and *manas* aspects are concerned. It is only in association with *buddhi* that the mind derives its illuminating power from the consciousness which is present in the background. *Buddhi* provides sensitiveness and the ability to penetrate into deeper levels of consciousness.

Ahamkara is the fourth aspect of mind. It is the centre of individualized consciousness – the very basis of man as a separate individual. It is the gross expression of the Monad. It is the 'I', the pivot round which our mental life revolves. The mental images and the experiences are co-ordinated into a harmonious and integrated whole by this egoic centre, the *ahamkara*. Although the mental operation is divided into four aspects, it takes place simultaneously in the mind of every individual. It is only for the purpose of understanding the process of mental operation that this analysis has been given to us.

The Voice of the Silence states: 'Mind is like a mirror; it gathers dust while it reflects.' As a mirror, mind can only reflect; it cannot shine by itself. Yogic psychology says that it is *jada* or insentient. In itself, it has no power of perception or of seeing the significance or meaning of things. It is for this reason that it is symbolized by the moon which shines by reflected light, while *atma* is symbolised by the sun which is self-illuminated.

There are two factors in mental perception. First, there is an object for the mind to perceive. This object may be either an external one which produces a mental image in the mind through the agency of sense-organs or a purely mental one which occupies the field of consciousness. The second factor, which is the most important, is the light of consciousness or *buddhi.* The mind must be illuminated by the light of consciousness not only in order to perceive the object but also to bring out its meaning and significance. This dual function takes place in the mind simultaneously. The fullness of apprehension of the object depends on the quality of the surface of the mirror. But as the mirror 'gathers dust while it reflects', the reflections of the object on the dusty surface can never be pure. This dusty surface becomes the ground from which its ideas and projections arise.

In *Pratyabhijna Hridaya,* one of the masterpieces of occult literature, this dust is described as *mala,* which signifies dirt or soiled garment. *Mala* dulls the individual soul and does not allow it to know its true nature. The malas are triple in nature. The first one, *anava mala* is the primary one. It is on account of this *mala* that the 'soul' is transformed into a limited and, hence, individual entity, and so it is the mala of separation and individualization. The second one is *maya mala,* which creates illusion and gives the soul its bodily form. The third is *karma mala* or the mala of action. It enchains the soul by good and evil actions. To get rid of *mala* or dust *The Voice of the Silence*

says: 'it needs the gentle breezes of Soul-Wisdom to brush away the dust of our illusions. Seek, O beginner, to blend the mind and soul.' Soul stands for consciousness. It is, therefore, necessary for us to understand the nature of consciousness and mind.

Unfortunately the word 'consciousness' is used very loosely and with different connotations; it is often used as a synonym for 'mind'. This leads to confusion; at the same time such an identity is inevitable because both are so closely related in their expression that we cannot easily distinguish between them. There can be no mind without consciousness. Man is essentially a mental being which means he is a being of consciousness; he is, therefore, capable of knowing himself apart from other things which he knows by impressions produced by them on his mind. Consciousness is responsible for self-awareness; consciousness *is* self-awareness; we not only know, but we are aware that we know. Consciousness is extraordinarily sensitive. Its depth is immeasurable; it is both a plenum and a void. Dr. Besant held consciousness and life to be identical – two names for one thing looked at from within and without respectively. There is no life without consciousness; there is no consciousness without life. But N. Sri Ram draws a fine distinction between them. He says, 'Although life and consciousness are in essence the same there is an important difference between them, as between water and air. Both are plastic. Life adapts itself to the body as water adapts itself to the configuration of a river-bed – a simile used by Bergson – but loses its freedom in doing so; consciousness is infinitely more plastic – not bound to the organization, as life is. In us, consciousness merely uses the organization, namely the body and the brain, as a basis. It can assume any form, mould itself into any image. Further, it can enlarge and contract, be open completely to everything or include many things, or concentrate on one thing. There is in it a dual direction. It

can turn outwards to things of the external world or inwards to its memories, ideas and emotions, in other words be objective or subjective.'

In man, consciousness is always bound up with thought, which is a sort of superstructure raised on the ground on basic awareness. Although mind arises out of consciousness, it is differentiated from it on account of its own action. Yogic psychology recognises their fundamental unity and, therefore, uses two analogous terms – consciousness *(citi)* and mind *(chitta)*. As regards the relationship between mind and consciousness, Dr Taimni says 'Although we can know to some extent the functions of mind, its contents, its modes of behiavour, it is very difficult to catch the mind itself and say, this is the mind. This absence of any definition or clear-cut conception of the nature of mind is not due to an oversight or lack of competence on the part of those who have expounded the philosophy and technique of Yoga. The real difficulty in isolating the mind and defining it lies in the fact that this cannot be done.'

Taimni explains the reasons for this indefinability of mind. He says: 'The mind when it is functioning is never without its modifications. It is hidden within or assimilated with its modifications and one can never get at it and see in itself. When you learn to control it and succeed in suppressing its modifications it is resolved into that from which it is derived, namely consciousness. So you cannot perceive it when it is present as mind because the modifications hide its true nature. You cannot perceive it when it has been freed from modifications because it is no longer there. It has been transformed into that from which it was derived.'

This analysis of the nature of mind is very revealing. As far as the average man is concerned, there is no mind without thought. But the root of the mind is not in the mental body. The mental body, like the physical, will

perish, but the mind will not die; it will resolve itself into consciousness when once it is relieved of the superstructure of thought.

The images in the mind provide the basis for thought. We have already noticed that images are produced in the mind and that there is a relentless succession and change of these images. Accordingly, there is a succession and change of thoughts. The more intellectual knowledge we acquire, the more images and thoughts occupy the field of consciousness. One may become a great scholar, one may write books and give lectures and not have an iota of wisdom.

As the *Ishávásya Upanishad* says: 'Those who are engaged in the illusory pursuits of the world remain involved in the darkness of ignorance. But those who are engrossed in the pursuit of intellectual knowledge for its own sake (mere scholarship) become involved in still greater darkness (lack of spiritual perception)'.

Intellectual knowledge is to be transmuted into wisdom – soul wisdom – as H.P.B. puts it in *The Voice of the Silence*. This can be done when the light of *buddhi* shines on the pure waters of the mind. The purity of the mind depends on the character of the individual. Spirituality demands the elimination of selfishness in any form, whether it be ambition, conceit, jealousy or the like. All these qualities arise from the *kama manas* – when *manas* is associated with *kama*. J. Krishnamurti, the outstanding philosopher of the modern age, constantly affirms that 'in order to attain basic awareness and thus come face to face with Reality, all thought must be eliminated; because thought is always old. In the very moment when thought is born it is of the past.' As soon as thought arises it moves into the past and in its place another thought arises. Perhaps it is similar in nature but, as we have seen, it is not the same. Thought is not a continuous process but a relentless succession of changes in the mind so rapid that

we are not aware of their discontinuity. If thought is not a continuous process but a succession, there should be a split moment between one thought and another.

Between two successive thoughts there is a momentary state in which there is no thought at all. At that moment, when there is no thought, there is no mind, as the mind without modifications cannot exist; immediately it is resolved into that from which it is derived, namely consciousness.

Pratyabhijna Hridaya says that by the unfoldment of the middle principle the state of bliss, *cidananda*, is made possible. Examining the methods for developing this middle principle, *Pratyabhijna Hridaya* gives priority to *vikalpakshaya* which means the complete cessation of the entire process of mentation. This cessation of the mental process can, in the beginning, be only for a short interval, known in Kashmir Shaivism as *vilaya*. Krishnamurti calls the gap between two thoughts, the 'creative interval'. *Light on the Path* describes this state beautifully: 'Call it by what name you will, it is a voice that speaks where there is none to speak – it is a messenger that comes, a messenger without form or substance; or it is the flower of the soul that has opened.'

The fusion of mind with consciousness takes place in a different dimension in the case of a mystic or a *bhakta*. The *bhakta* does not 'reason' God, he feels Him. In the deepest nature of every human being there is the soul's urge to merge with the Over-Soul: deep in the mind there is the hidden aspiration to join the source from which it has come. As the aspiration of the *bhakta* passes upwards, grace and blessing flow downwards. We find this consummation in the lives of all mystics in both East and West; all of them had a passionate and intense desire to reach their Beloved. The word 'passion' is used in Christian mysticism; in India it is called *tivra avedana*. That intense hunger, that deep aspiration towards God

helps the *bhakta* to leap from the emotion to *buddhi*. C. Jinarajadasa puts it graphically when he says, 'A mystic jumps from emotional nature to the Buddhic condition, transcending the mental region. When he is overwhelmed with the flow of consciousness, the modifications of the mind come to a standstill automatically and the whole nature is uplifted. Some *bhaktas* use the form of their Beloved to reach the formless. It is not the image of the Beloved, but the state of mind that matters. Ultimately the consciousness of the devotee fuses not with the form but with the consciousness which is behind the form. The union can never be in the realm of the concrete mind of names and forms but in that of consciousness on the plane of *buddhi*.

Ultimately, a true *bhakta* finds the Godhead within himself. As a Sufi saint sings:

I cast off my own self
As a serpent casts off its skin.
Then I considered my own Self
And found that I was He,
The God, the Universal Consciousness.

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